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Subject: Morning Clips

More dioxane found at Ford site in Ringwood

Last updated: Monday, March 28, 2016, 1:20 AM

By SCOTT FALLON, STAFF WRITER, Bergen Record
NorthJersey.com

RINGWOOD — A toxic chemical that has been found throughout the Ford Superfund site has been detected there again at low levels in a recently drilled monitoring well, a new engineering report shows.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said the discovery of more 1,4-dioxane at the site is not a surprise since it was already found in several places near the abandoned mines where Ford Motor Co. dumped tons of industrial waste more than 50 years ago. The agency has maintained that there is no imminent health threat from the chemical, a probable carcinogen.

The report with the January test results will likely be among the subjects discussed at a community meeting with the EPA scheduled for April 20. The last meeting, on March 1, drew an overflow crowd to Borough Hall after it was revealed that the agency knew the chemical was in groundwater at the site but didn't reveal it to the public for months.

The chemical, 1,4-dioxane, is a colorless solvent that has been used in paint varnishes and other materials. It is difficult to remove from water because it blends very well. Traces of the chemical have been found in recent years in several small North Jersey drinking water systems.

The EPA has not yet determined if the chemical comes from the tons of toxic paint sludge and other contamination from Ford's former Mahwah plant, which was deposited both in two centuries-old mineshafts and aboveground next to a neighborhood. The EPA took the site off the Superfund list in 1994 after some contaminated soil was removed. It was put back on the list after a 2005 series by The Record documented widespread contamination left at the 500-acre site.

Community distrust in the agency grew even more in recent years when the EPA approved a plan that would save Ford more than \$20 million in cleanup costs by keeping 166,000 tons of contaminated soil at the site under a barrier rather than excavating it.

The borough and EPA only began testing for 1,4-dioxane last year as part of a national standard to test all Superfund sites for the chemical.

The chemical was first detected at the site last April in samples collected by a consultant for the borough. It was detected again in June deep in the Peter's Mine Airshaft at one of the highest levels at the site: an estimated 150 micrograms per liter. Sampling in August showed smaller amounts of the chemical but in more places: in wells closer the surface near Sheehan Drive, in a brook that runs through the site, and outside the site's boundaries at the mouth of Sally's Pond, once a popular fishing and swimming hole in Ringwood State Park.

Residents were incensed they weren't told of the chemical's discovery until an article in The Record detailed some of the findings in February. The rest were shown to the public at an EPA meeting this month, where agency officials apologized for the delay.

The new report shows that 1,4-dioxane was detected in one of two wells dug to assess groundwater contamination near the Peters Mine Pit area of the Superfund site. The concentration of 1,4-dioxane was slightly above New Jersey's groundwater standard of 0.4 micrograms per liter, but EPA officials characterized it as "low level" because it's well below the agency's lifetime health-advisory level of 200 micrograms per liter.

"The results from this limited sampling event appear to be consistent with previous sampling events, which indicate that 1,4-dioxane is only present at low levels in shallow groundwater in the Peters Mine Pit area of the site," said EPA spokesman Elias Rodriguez.

The wells also contained very high levels of manganese — about 100 to 200 times New Jersey's standard. The EPA says the levels of the metal are consistent with past findings and most likely did not come from Ford's waste.

A very small amount of 1,4-dioxane was detected in Ringwood's drinking water in 2013, but EPA officials said this week that it likely did not come from the Ford site.

The drinking water wells are located in a different watershed about three miles from Peters Mine. The chemical was not detected in samples taken this year, Borough Manager Scott Heck told the Borough Council this month.

The chemical was not found at the Wanaque Reservoir in tests conducted in 2013. Because it was found in the groundwater and brooks, the reservoir's operator plans to test the water again for the chemical.

The next community meeting with EPA will be held at 6:30 p.m. April 20 at Ryerson Middle School, 130 Valley Road.

EPA OK's ban on boat sewage dumping in St. Lawrence River

March 27, 2016

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Boats are allowed to dump their toilets into the waters of the St. Lawrence River, but that's about to change.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that a "no discharge zone" can be established for the New York portion of the river. The state Department of Environmental Conservation petitioned the EPA to take that action to prohibit sewage-dumping from boats.

The state and federal agencies determined that the St. Lawrence has enough pump-out facilities to remove waste from all types of vessels.

The EPA is taking public comment on its proposed approval of a "no discharge zone" until April 25.

New York waters already established as "no discharge zones" include Lakes Erie, Ontario, Champlain, and George, the New York State Canal System and the Hudson River, among others.

Rising GOP Star in West Virginia Fight for Coal Against EPA

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MARCH 26, 2016, 10:57 A.M. E.D.T.

NY Times

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Patrick Morrissey, the West Virginia attorney general taking on President Obama's clean power plan, is no stranger to the hot seat: He parlayed a love of tennis as a young adult into becoming a line judge at the U.S. Open and other tournaments, regularly standing up to second-guessing by irate players and fans.

Fast forward to 2016. The 48-year-old transplanted New Jersey native is challenging the Obama administration's calls, joined by several mostly Republican states in suing to try to overturn federal greenhouse gas rules. He says taking the heat on the courts taught him to stay cool in court years later.

"You learn how to handle pressure when you have a crowd of people screaming at you for one of your calls," Morrissey told The Associated Press. " ... Of course, I'd not like to repeat being booed out of the stadium. But that could be good practice for politics."

Elected in 2012, West Virginia's first GOP attorney general in eight decades has made fighting "federal overreach" his mantra. He's leading a coalition of attorneys general that won a U.S. Supreme Court stay last month against Obama's clean power plan.

That plan against climate change focuses particularly on cutting pollutants from coal-fired power plants. Welcomed by many, it's blasted by critics as a possible knockout blow to the coal industry.

Pressed by Morrissey's group, the justices froze the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to reduce U.S. carbon-dioxide emissions 32 percent by 2030 — while legal challenges are pending.

In West Virginia, seven coal-fired power plants have shut in recent years, and more than 1,000 miners have lost work since December alone.

"I'm very fortunate to have this job at this time so I could fight for coal miners and make West Virginia a better place to live," Morrissey said.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, co-chair of the attorney generals' group, said Morrissey's a fighter: "He quickly recognized what an impact it would have on West Virginia. I think that's why he grabbed the leadership mantle."

More than a dozen other states support Obama's plan, while environmentalists criticize Morrissey as hindering moves toward cleaner energy sources.

"We believe that the attorney general's blind allegiance to coal is a disservice to future generations," said Jim Kotcon of West Virginia's Sierra Club chapter. "The clean power plan is necessary to address climate change. We think the EPA is on sound legal ground."

The White House declined to comment about Morrissey.

Democratic California Gov. Jerry Brown wrote Morrissey and Paxton that their arguments were "legally flimsy" and "at worst, you're sending a dangerous message to the world: on climate change, do nothing."

Of detractors, Morrissey said: "People aren't always going to be happy with every decision that you make. But if you make the right decision and you stick to it, good things will usually happen."

It's a fight Morrissey didn't foresee upon moving to Harpers Ferry in 2006 from a private Washington, D.C., law practice. Yet the longer he lived in West Virginia, "the more I realized the state was being held back by policies that were not in the people's interest."

Frustrated by a five-term attorney general reluctant to oppose Obama's policies, Morrissey ran in 2012 and won. His campaign aligned with state Democrats accusing Obama of waging "war on coal."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce acknowledged involvement in Morrissey's race. President and CEO Thomas J. Donahue said the Chamber's Institute for Legal Reform, which doesn't have to disclose its donors, conducted "voter education efforts" in several states that year. Board members include executives at several big corporations, including energy companies.

Morrissey's campaign continues.

In 2013, after Obama targeted carbon dioxide at power plants, Morrissey filed a Supreme Court brief, joined by other states.

In 2014, Morrissey wrote "Why I Sued The President," a "National Review" article on Obama's dare to Republicans to try to block his initiatives. "I accepted the president's invitation," Morrissey wrote. "A president is not a king."

Morrissey also sued over federal moves to shift legal responsibility to the states for canceled health plans and took on pharmaceutical makers while seeking stronger prescription drug regulations in a state rife with fatal overdoses.

"Our intent is always to win cases," Morrissey told The AP. "We only file lawsuits and briefs when we believe we are correct on the merits. We have tried to gum up the works on a number of cases because of what the administration has been doing in terms of its abuse of executive authority ... "

Regarding his own views on climate change, Morrissey said he focuses strictly on opposing regulations capable of a "great deal of harm."

Sure, he wants clean air and water. But his emphasis "will remain solely on the law. To move off of that and start to talk about the policy ideas when we're in the middle of a lawsuit really is not appropriate."

Morrissey won't hint at future goals beyond getting re-elected this fall.

Observers say his newfound prominence could take him, as with West Virginia, to places he never expected. "Patrick Morrissey is in charge of his own destiny politically," said Conrad Lucas, West Virginia's Republican Party chairman.

For Morrissey, tackling a problem with a "little bit of smarts" and a willingness to "outwork" others is a recipe for success. He's quick to add: "When you have an opportunity to make a difference, you take advantage of it."

This story has been corrected to say that the White House declined to comment instead of not responding to a request for comment.

Neighbors ask state to probe alleged dump in Wantage

Updated: Mar. 27, 2016 11:10 am

New Jersey Journal

WANTAGE -- About 25 families belonging to the Lake Windsor Property Owners Association have banded together to ask local, county and state official officials to address what they believe is an illegal dumping operation taking place on farmland-assessed property on a mountain overlooking the lake.

In a recent letter to the state Department of Environmental Protection, the association has alleged that Joseph Maggio has been "running an illegal solid waste dump and recycling operation" at the top of Grandview Lane for the last several years with numerous trucks carting construction debris and other solid waste there on a daily basis.

Attempts by the New Jersey Herald over the last two weeks to reach Maggio via a listed number for Joe Maggio Concrete & Masonry have been unsuccessful.

But after a public appeal for action earlier this month by Lake Windsor residents, township officials are expected to pay a site visit in the coming week. It was not immediately clear if the visit would be by appointment or if, as residents have requested, it would be unannounced.

But Township Attorney Glenn Kienz, addressing residents at Thursday's meeting of the Township Committee, said Township Engineer Harold Pellow and Zoning Officer Patrick Stefanelli "are going to take a look at (Maggio's) property and figure out what additional steps need to be taken, so it is in progress."

'Constant noise'

In their letter to the DEP, the residents of Lake Windsor accuse Maggio of "operating numerous pieces of heavy diesel fuel machinery including bulldozers, backhoes, and front-end loaders and ... a very loud concrete crusher machine."

The letter goes on to cite "serious concerns about the impact of Maggio's operations on the health of Lake Windsor, and that various contaminants could be reaching or will eventually reach the lake," which measures about one mile long and is used for swimming, boating and other recreational activities.

Among the contaminants that the Lake Windsor residents believe may be involved are "pollutants from fuel spills and other debris that rolls down the mountain into the lake," which is situated along Old Beaver Run (Lewisburg) Road and is surrounded by about 10 lakefront homes and another 10 or so adjoining properties with a view of the lake.

The letter also asserts a belief that topsoil trucked in to Maggio's property, which he accesses via a private road adjoining Spreen Road, is being used to hide "an array of solid waste" buried underneath.

Maggio told the Wantage Township Committee at its March 10 meeting that while he does demolition for a living, "I also haul dirt for a living."

He maintained at the March 10 meeting that he has DEP permits for all the work that he does.

But a resident, Ron Sevean, said, "There is very little doubt in any of our minds that this is a solid waste facility."

"There is a giant concrete crushing machine that goes night and day. ... You hear the banging, you hear the thumping, you hear the constant noise nonstop at three and four o'clock in the morning," Sevean said.

Several residents who attended the March 10 Township Committee meeting and a subsequent one on March 24 have also alleged that in addition to subjecting them to intolerable noise, Maggio's operation is subjecting them to fumes and invasive commercial-grade lighting, often into the late-night and early-morning hours.

"I live directly under Mr. Maggio, and he lights up my bedroom at 3 o'clock in the morning like it's a freaking airport," Carolyn Lamura said.

'Aren't there laws?'

Another resident, Glenn Ball, has questioned how such an operation fits within the township's zoning laws since Maggio's property is currently assessed as farmland.

According to records of the Sussex Board of Taxation, Maggio owns 20.57 acres, one of which is assessed as regular farmland and was billed \$18,229.15 in property taxes last year.

The remaining 19.57 acres he owns are assessed as "qualified farmland," which allows for property tax exemptions of up to 98 percent, and resulted in him paying \$59.55 in taxes on the parcel last year.

The state's farmland assessment rules are meant to help agriculture and forestry remain economically viable in New Jersey by providing tax breaks to property owners who meet the criteria.

Ball, however, questioned how Maggio's operation fits within those criteria.

"Aren't there laws?" Ball asked. "Can you just have a landfill on your property and nobody's monitoring what's coming off of those trucks? This has been going on for years. I'm not talking about a guy bringing an occasional truck in and filling in a depression on his property with topsoil. This guy's bringing in concrete (and) asphalt."

"We have a county landfill (where) they have to follow regulations," Ball added. "There's people monitoring what goes in there. You can't just go over there and dump anything you want. How can he do it?"

Members of the Township Committee, while indicating they are taking the concerns seriously, have expressed surprise at some of the issues raised at the March 10 and March 24 meetings.

At least two residents questioned that and said they have raised these issues previously but gotten little or no help from the township.

Others, however, said they have been reluctant to come forward because of being threatened by Maggio with lawsuits if they persisted in complaining. Maggio, at the March 10 Township Committee meeting, said at one

point to one of about 20 Lake Windsor residents in attendance that "I hope you can spend your summer vacation money on lawyers."

'25 families are not lying'

"You want to know why you haven't seen us (at previous meetings)?" Lorine Barone responded. "Did you not hear that not-so-veiled threat that was just thrown at us?"

Mayor Ron Bassani has indicated he has taken note of the residents' concerns but has stated he cannot be directly involved in "driving this issue" because of having previously served on a jury in a case involving Maggio and a Lake Windsor resident.

Bassani and Township Committee members Bill Gaechter and Jon Morris have also indicated the governing body is not an enforcement agency and that such authority resides with the township's zoning officer, who is following up on the complaints.

Residents of Lake Windsor, meanwhile, have said they intend to stay on the issue and will renew their appeals to county and state officials to investigate if the township is unable to resolve their concerns.

"I'm telling you there's something wrong, and 25 families are not lying to you," LiTrenta said.

"If you would like to come in the middle of the night, you would see the lights at Mr. Maggio's residence and you would hear the noise that we are talking about," she said. "We are not making this up."

Eric Obernauer can also be contacted on Twitter: @EricObernNJH or by 973-383-1213.

Lead contamination pits city vs. Turnpike: City officials say they must do more than just sweeping up lead paint chips

by Al Sullivan

Mar 27, 2016

Hudson Reporter.com

Jersey City has closed several parks and sports fields due to lead contamination associated with the cleaning of the New Jersey Turnpike extension. City health officials closed Mary Benson Park on March 17 after health inspectors found lead paint chips in the park. Since then, more contamination has been found at other locations, forcing additional closings.

City officials, however, say sweeping up the mess isn't enough and have contacted the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) demanding a more thorough remediation.

"With increased awareness on lead contamination, particularly in water systems making national news, we wanted to exert an abundance of caution with regard to paint chips found in Mary Benson Park caused by construction on the New Jersey Turnpike Extension above the park," said Jennifer Morrill, spokesperson for the city.

"Hudson Regional Health Commission tested the paint chips and preliminary results found the presence of lead, so we proactively closed the park until the Turnpike Authority can remove the paint chips and any contamination from the park and implement a containment mechanism to prevent further exposure," she said.

“While this contamination is localized, the park is used by children during the school day and after school so we wanted to take the necessary precautions.”

Notification led to inspection

The city was notified on March 17 by the Regional Health Commission that paint chips from construction work by the Turnpike Authority on the overhead Turnpike Extension were found in Mary Benson Park.

The Jersey City Health Department sent inspectors out to canvass the entire area beneath the Turnpike Extension to determine if there were any other impacted public areas. Inspectors found paint chips at the Ninth Street Park that includes the Enos Jones playground and the Roberto Clemente baseball field. Hudson Regional Health Commission was notified and sent an inspector and the park and ball field have been closed pending cleanup by the Turnpike Authority.

“For years now lead paint chips and likely contaminated water have fallen from the New Jersey Turnpike extension and landed directly onto several parks, playgrounds and homes in downtown Jersey City.” – Candice Osborne

The Turnpike Authority is scheduled to begin cleanup of Mary Benson Park and the Ninth Street Park this week, Morrill said.

Further soil testing will be done following the surface remediation. The Turnpike Authority has also advised they will install netting to prevent additional contamination and will perform daily inspections of the area.

High school baseball teams who use the facility for practice and games have been notified and the Jersey City Recreation Department is working with the schools to find alternate locations.

“Last year through grant funding, we increased the number of people tested for lead by 3,000 and while currently there is increased awareness and sensitivity around the issue, we have been testing children for years and will continue to be proactively encouraging families on this,” Morrill said. “In addition to testing at their facility, HHS is equipped to host screenings in neighborhoods and will continue to work with the JCPS, PTAs and block associations to host screenings.”

Council members believe parks need full clean up

Council members Candice Osborne and Daniel Rivera said the Turnpike needs to do a comprehensive cleanup, not merely collecting paint chips from the parks.

“For years now, lead paint chips and likely contaminated water have fallen from the New Jersey Turnpike extension and landed directly onto several parks, playgrounds and homes in downtown Jersey City,” Osborne said in a letter issued to the state this week. “Our city officials have found lead paint chips at Mary Benson Park, Enos Jones Park and on the grounds of Ferris High School.”

She said Jersey City has invested millions of dollars in the remediating public land, including hundreds of thousands of dollars on Mary Benson Park.

“While it is frustrating to close down the park used by an elementary school and the park used for our Little League teams, I am thankful that the Jersey City Health Department has been proactive and am encouraged to hear that the Turnpike Authority will begin remediation of the parks immediately,” she said.

“However the remediation of the parks only begins to address the larger issues. Per meetings with the city yesterday, I was made aware that the Turnpike Authority could not provide protective netting until at least June. Putting aside the immediate remediation - how will Jersey City children be protected from the Turnpike’s continuing work until then? What about private homes and landowners who have been impacted by the work?”

She said the contaminated water runoff comes down the leaders on each stanchion on the extension, flooding the area around city parks with toxic materials.

“It’s been flooding and polluting the neighborhood without any penalty for decades,” Osborne said. “This standing water is also a breeding ground for mosquitoes, an obvious nuisance but also a heightened concern this year given the unknown Zika virus. City workers have asked multiple times for the Turnpike Authority to put in retention systems, and the agency’s response was that it was “not our fault.”

“What I know and what the residents of Jersey City know is that the park was there decades before the Turnpike.”

Osborne said that she is asking the Turnpike Authority to cease all work on the Turnpike extension covering downtown Jersey City until netting can be provided, ensure proper remediation of storm water runoff, initiate and facilitate a meeting with local residents to hear concerns and inform them of the plan of action, conduct door-to-door testing and remediation for lead, covering land from a designated point of distance on the eastern and western sides of the turnpike extension, including private homes and commence an independent environmental investigation of the impact of the Turnpike Authority work beyond the immediate remediation.

Rivera said he wants the Turnpike Authority to conduct a comprehensive cleanup of these sites, and include the installation of artificial turf on the playing fields.

Water being tested also

Mayor Steven Fulop said the city has already started testing water as a result of reports of contamination in Flint, Mich.

“We heard the concerns of residents and hired independent contractors to ensure that Jersey City’s water is safe, potable and of high quality,” Fulop said. “Some of the results have been returned and look safe, but all of the testing should be completed with the full and final report to be delivered in the next two weeks.”

Two years ago, the Board of Education tested fountains and sinks (many of which have lead pipes) and those that were found above recommended lead levels were disconnected and replaced with bottled water systems. United Water, at that time, also tested hydrants near schools and the fountains in the schools, Fulop said.

Recently, according to United Water (now known as Suez), the Board of Education has hired another consultant to again inspect their systems.

Based on the Newark schools situation, the Department of Environmental Protection is encouraging United Water to take a proactive approach and explain the Environmental Protection Agency’s recommended protocols on schools to the Board of Education, which includes flushing and proper maintenance of their systems to ensure that no lead is entering drinking water.

On Health Department testing

Fulop said the Jersey City Department of Health & Human Services increased instances of lead testing from 103 in calendar year 2014 to 3,351 in 2015. Lead testing and education by the lead staff increased 815 percent in just one year.

“We engaged 37 additional Registered Nurses studying for their BSN from New Jersey City University to assist in our enhanced Lead Testing Initiative,” Fulop said. “The City of Jersey City also received \$500,000 funded by the New Jersey State social service block grant for Hurricane Sandy recovery. This grant funding has allowed us to provide more expansive lead education and testing.”

Al Sullivan may be reached at asullivan@hudsonreporter.com.

Read more: Hudson Reporter - Lead contamination pits city vs Turnpike City officials say they must do more than just sweeping up lead paint chips

Recycling prices at six-year low

By DAVID L. SHAW dshaw@fltimes.com

Mar 25, 2016

HOPEWELL — During a time when recycling is encouraged more than ever before, the prices being paid for recyclables, or “commodities,” hit a six-year low in 2015.

And, there is no sign of an impending comeback.

Casella Waste Systems, which operates the Ontario County Landfill and an onsite recycling facility, and county Planning Director Tom Harvey delivered that news to the Board of Supervisors’ environmental quality committee Wednesday.

Committee members were informed that prices paid for recyclable materials aren’t likely to rise because of “challenges with glass, reduced demand for fiber and falling oil prices affecting the value of plastics.”

Casella officials and Harvey presented a chart showing prices paid for recyclable materials dropping in 2008 as a result of the economic downturn. The recession precipitated a drop in global manufacturing and subsequent reduction in demand for raw materials.

Recycling became profitable again when the economy rebounded, but only briefly. Beginning in 2012, there was a 40 percent drop in commodity prices over an 18-month period.

The prices paid for recycled materials from residential sources has decreased from \$110.20 per ton in 2011 to \$54.56 this year. That includes newspapers, glass, plastics, aluminum, steel, tin and other items.

During the same period, the prices paid for commercial recycled materials dipped from \$120.65 to \$72.50 per ton.

“Newspaper demand has declined with more online reading habits,” Harvey explained. “Also, the price of a barrel of oil has hit 10-year lows, a big driver of the plastics market, and glass makes up only 21 percent of the recycling stream, with inconsistent end markets available.”

“Revenue from recycling is down, yet our solid waste plan calls for more recycling. How will that work?” asked Drew Wickham, R-Seneca.

“It’s market driven,” Harvey said. “We just have to deal with it.”

Charlie Evangelista, D-city of Geneva, suggested a way to “incentivize” recycling be identified.

Mark Venuti, D-town of Geneva, said he would encourage better-quality recycled materials.

EQC chairman Rich Russell, R-city of Canandaigua, was hopeful the trend could change in the next 24-36 months

Opinion: NYC’s big green bid to degrade the environment

By Michael Heimbinder

March 25, 2016 | 7:57pm

NY Post

New York City’s requirement that all heating oil used here contain 2 percent biodiesel fuel is a generous handout to the biofuels industry — and a terrible deal for the environment and everyday New Yorkers.

Yet now, the City Council wants to jack up the percentage — to 5 percent by year’s end, and to a whopping 20 percent by 2030.

And it’s all being driven by a wrongheaded notion that biodiesel is an environmentally friendly fuel.

Fact is, the environmental movements in the United States and Europe are both nearly unanimous in their condemnations, noting time and again that biofuels — fuels derived from food products — encourage environmentally destructive farming practices.

They also have little impact on foreign-oil consumption, drive up food prices, devour millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies and boost greenhouse gas and toxic air emissions. Council members don’t seem to be getting the message.

Backers of the mandate see themselves as leaders in the city’s effort to improve the environment. And certainly the mayor and council should be thanked for recently passing emissions-cutting legislation. But the aggressive bioheat proposal now before the council represents a potentially serious step backward for the city’s air quality.

Independent research has shown that burning biodiesel produces significantly more nitrous oxides than conventional fuels — even as it produces less energy. Damaging to human health in their own right, nitrous oxides also act as a global-warming agent hundreds of times more potent than CO2.

Plus, they’re a key ingredient in ozone, a pollutant already so abundant in New York that the federal government has designated the city out of compliance with the Clean Air Act.

Soybeans are the top feedstock for biodiesel refineries, and down on the farm it’s not a pretty sight. For starters, most soybeans grown in the United States — 94 percent — are genetically engineered to survive despite being

doused with ever-increasing quantities of glyphosate, a powerful weed killer linked to rare cancers, miscarriages and premature births.

Worse, America's industrial-scale soybean farms are themselves dependent on fossil fuels: Large volumes of natural gas are needed to produce nitrogen-based fertilizers for soybean-farm fields. Fossil fuels also power the machines that plow, plant, harvest, cast fertilizers and spray weed killer on the farms, further adding to air emissions.

On top of all this, the fertilizers that are used eventually run off the farms and taint water supplies, contributing to a New Jersey-size dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico devoid of marine life.

The costs, though, aren't just to the environment. Consumers and businesses are forced to pay more for "bioheat" — that is, heat produced from biodiesel.

A gallon of heating oil with a 20 percent biodiesel blend will cost 20 cents to 30 cents more. That's an extra charge that will hit low-income New Yorkers most. Thus, the very people struggling to deal with steep housing and other New York City costs will be forced to shell out their hard-earned cash for a necessity they can't live without.

Curbing emissions from heating is certainly a worthwhile goal, but there are better and less costly ways to do it.

Producing heat more efficiently is an obvious place to start.

Better furnaces and better-insulated homes translate into less fuel used, cutting emissions and fuel costs. Switching to natural-gas boilers, a trend already under way in the city, is another reliable way to roll back emissions from heating and save money.

Government mandates that create an artificial market for biodiesel wind up causing more pollution at Midwestern mega-farms and biodiesel refineries. But they're also a terrible deal for just about everyone else, in terms of both the financial and environmental costs.

Only the biofuel industry — which, let's face it, is the driving force behind these requirements — stands to gain.

The Big Apple knows when something is rotten. Forcing New Yorkers to blend soybeans into their heating oil — and to pay for the "privilege" of wrecking the environment and poisoning the air they breathe — is about as rotten as it gets.

Michael Heimbinder is founder and executive director of HabitatMap, a nonprofit that works to improve air quality.

LI water suppliers seek more funding for DEC programs

03/25/2016

Newsday

Every water supplier on Long Island and more than 60 industry groups are asking elected officials in Albany to increase funding for state water quality and protection programs in the region.

In a letter to the Island's delegation, the Long Island Water Conference pushed Senate and Assembly members to restore funding to higher levels associated with a decade ago for the Department of Environmental Conservation's water division.

The group of water industry professionals said Long Island "needs the additional funding to maintain the staff and technology essential to protect our sole source aquifer and help us continue to provide safe, high-quality water to our residents."

The plea comes as the state's roughly \$155 billion budget is due April 1. Senate and Assembly members have been working for weeks to hammer out spending plans.

The water conference did not cite specific staffing numbers or an amount, but it is expected to be less than \$1 million.

"It's their mission to manage the aquifer, but if they don't have the proper staff to do it, how could they do it?" said conference vice chairman Stan Carey, Massapequa Water District's superintendent. "We'd just like to see the staffing levels increase so they can do a more efficient, thorough job."

Assemb. Steven Englebright (D-Setauket), who chairs the chamber's Environmental Conservation Committee, said he would push for more funding during budget negotiations.

"I think it's important enough that it should be considered," he said. "I think it's a matter of public health at the highest levels."

Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, an East Northport Republican, did not respond to requests for comment.

The proposed DEC spending for fiscal year 2017 is \$998 million, up 8.2 percent from \$922 million this year.

The DEC said while many issues are handled by Albany staff, the Long Island water division has 11 employees - a number the agency said has stayed the same for several years. Statewide, staffing levels peaked at 278 full-time water division employees in 2008 and were at 226 as of this week, the agency said.

"The state is deeply committed to addressing water pollution and has maintained staffing levels . . . since the beginning of this administration, continuing to provide critical resources to address water issues statewide," DEC spokesman Sean Mahar said in a statement.

The agency pointed to a new \$6 million study to model groundwater, formation of a rapid-response water quality team, and regulation of mulching facilities as ways Long Island is getting attention.

Water industry officials want local DEC officials minding the water, not Albany.

"As far as I am concerned, they have a skeleton staff out there," said Dennis Kelleher, president of Melville-based H2M Water and a member of the Long Island Water Conference.

The handling of Superfund sites, from the large plume coming from a Northrop Grumman and Navy site in Bethpage, to smaller spills, is a concern. Most of New York gets its drinking water from rivers, streams and reservoirs, not underground aquifers like on Long Island.

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EPA, Homeland Security to weigh in on new Plum Island study

03/25/2016

Newsday

U.S. lawmakers on Friday announced a study of Plum Island's natural and historic resources, calling it an important step in halting the sale of the island to the highest bidder.

Representatives from New York and Connecticut said four agencies would weigh options for preserving the island as officials work to close a government laboratory specializing in livestock diseases.

Leah Schmalz, program director for the advocacy group Connecticut Fund for the Environment, called the study a turning point for the federal government, which she said must now consider protecting the island after years spent trying to sell it.

"I think it represents the moment that we set foot on a different path," she said.

Federal officials announced in 2009 that they would shutter the federal Plum Island Animal Disease Center and auction off the island to help fund the construction of a replacement laboratory in Kansas, set to open in 2022.

Environmentalists and lawmakers from the region have fought the possibility of a developer buying the island, located a mile off Orient Point with pristine habitats and fortifications from the Spanish-American War.

Donald Trump expressed interest in developing a golf course on the island in 2013. Southold Town officials that year passed zoning rules preventing homes from being built on the island.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Connecticut) said in a news release Friday that the study will "provide the science and fact-based evidence to make our case" to stop any sale and called the island an "irreplaceable national treasure."

Blumenthal's announcement came one day after he and other U.S. senators from New York and Connecticut called on the federal government to turn the island into a national park or wildlife refuge. They said funding was already in place for the Kansas laboratory, making the sale of Plum Island unnecessary.

Lawmakers have directed the Department of Homeland Security, which operates the laboratory, to work on the study with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior and the agency in charge of selling the island, the General Services Administration.

Schmalz said it's the first time the EPA and Department of the Interior, whose officials have expressed reservations about the sale impacting wildlife, are directly involved in Plum Island's fate.

She said she hopes the report results in "an actual pathway to conservation," including information about funds and legislation needed to make it happen, and expects the report to be submitted to Congress by June.

Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) said the island "offers our region a unique research and environmental resource that should be preserved for generations to come."

Keep PA Beautiful Launches New Electronics Waste Recycling Website as consumer guide to electronics recycling in Pa.

Published: Monday, March 28, 2016

Bucks Local

BUCKS COUNTY >> Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has launched www.eWastePA.org to help ensure Pennsylvania consumers have the information they need to properly manage their electronic waste such as old televisions and computer monitors, commonly referred to as e-waste.

The Covered Device Recycling Act (Act 108), enacted in 2010, prohibits the acceptance of ‘covered devices’ such as televisions, computers, computer monitors and all peripherals, at any Pennsylvania solid waste disposal facilities. This prohibits residents from putting them out at the curb for pickup by their waste hauler.

The law also stipulates that recyclers cannot charge a fee to offset the cost of proper recycling as the cost of collection, transportation and recycling is to be borne by electronics manufacturers.

Unfortunately, according to Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, the law isn’t working and has created an imbalance of supply and demand causing many electronics collection programs to shut down leaving many consumers without means to recycle their old electronics.

While some residents are holding on to electronic devices until the law is fixed, there are others that are not. Instead, they are choosing to dump them in alleys, over riverbanks, and alongside our roadways.

Illegal dumping of any waste is harmful to the environment and costly to surrounding communities, with the average community cleanup costing around \$3,000.

To make matters worse, electronic devices contain lead, cadmium and mercury that, if not properly managed or contained, may become hazardous waste and pose a threat to human health and the environment.

“We know consumers want to do the right thing and dispose of their old televisions and other electronics properly. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful launched www.eWastePA.org to educate, empower and engage consumers on e-waste recycling in Pennsylvania,” said Shannon Reiter, President of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful.

“The site not only explains why and how we got here, it links consumers to recycling programs in their community,” explained Reiter. “It also provides easy to use tools for consumers to advocate for access to convenient and affordable trash disposal and recycling in Pennsylvania by linking them with their local legislators as well as the original equipment manufacturers that are responsible for carrying the cost of recycling of e-waste in Pennsylvania.”

The website answers these basic questions consumers have about electronics recycling — Why your waste haulers won’t take your TV; Where to find an electronic recycling drop-off center near you; How to dispose of your electronic devices; What happens if the law is not fixed? And What you can do about it.

Visit Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful’s www.eWastePA.org website for more information.

Length of fence around Wheatfield landfill to be reduced as research rebuts fears of radiation

By Thomas J. Prohaska | News Niagara Reporter | @ThomasProhaska | Google+

on March 27, 2016 - 5:34 PM

WHEATFIELD – The length of a planned fence around a hazardous landfill off Nash Road will be less than expected, reducing the cost accordingly, Supervisor Robert B. Cliffe said at last week's Town Board meeting.

Meanwhile, the developer of a planned residential subdivision that would extend to about a half-mile from the landfill provided The Buffalo News with a report that rebuts contentions by critics that there is radioactive waste on the site.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has directed the town to put up a fence around the old Niagara Sanitation Co. landfill, which is near the North Tonawanda city line.

In December the DEC reclassified the site as a significant threat to public health. That was done so the state Superfund law could be used to pursue companies or their successors that disposed of waste there, in an effort to make them pay for a cleanup of the 18.7-acre landfill.

Cliffe said the DEC has informed him that the town doesn't have to build a fence around the driveway leading to the landfill, just the dump itself. That saves 2,800 feet of fencing, Cliffe said, and the amount needed to get around the landfill will be about 4,400 feet.

At the meeting, the board awarded a \$6,800 contract to the Wendel engineering firm: \$5,000 to design the fence and \$1,800 for a survey of the boundaries of the property. The DEC says the landfill covers most of a 20.8-acre parcel.

Niagara Sanitation closed in 1968, and the town ended up with ownership of the landfill. Last year, a contractor paid by Occidental Chemical Corp. removed some 1,600 cubic yards, or 80 truckloads, of Love Canal waste from the dump by order of the DEC. The waste was deposited there by crews from the state Department of Transportation in the summer of 1968, when the Love Canal site was disturbed during construction of the LaSalle Expressway.

State Sen. Robert G. Ort, R-North Tonawanda, has lined up \$75,000 in state funding to help pay for what is expected to be a 6-foot-high chain-link fence.

On the radiation question at the proposed subdivision, Bob Weaver, owner of Bob Weaver Motorsports, said he has a scientific report showing that the property is clean.

Weaver hired MJW Corp., of Amherst, to research the issue. Its on-site study, conducted March 8, used two radiation detectors to check readings at eight locations on the site of the proposed subdivision, which is to be built on former farmland, and compare them with background levels.

All the readings in the field showed radiation levels of 5 or 6 microrems per hour. "If someone was present at that location for 2,000 hours per year, the annual exposure would be 12 millirems," the report said. There are 1,000 microrems in a millirem.

By contrast, government figures estimate that the average exposure to naturally occurring radiation is 310 millirems per year. In other words, the subdivision site has 25 times less radiation than the general environment.

The proposed 23-home subdivision is to be called Aubrey Way after the name of a new entrance road to be built into the site from Nash Road. In December and January, some local residents urged the Town Board to block

the subdivision because of purported environmental risks. Weaver's dealership sits in front of the parcel on the Niagara Falls Boulevard side of the property.

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Letter to Editor: GAS PIPELINES JUST AREN'T SAFE

03/27/2016

Times Union

I found Inge Grafe-Kieklak's letter ("Pipeline gas would keep Amphenol competitive," March 6) to be misleading. Grafe-Kieklak is a large landowner in the Marcellus Shale region, and president of the Landowner Advocates of New York. This is not a grassroots organization; it was formed by the well-known and well-funded fossil fuel industry group Energy in Depth.

Grafe-Kieklak indicates that gas is "developed responsibly." In fact, multiple recent studies show fracking gas has contributed to water and air pollution. Duke University found methane levels in private water wells are, on average, 17 times higher in wells within 1,000 feet of a natural gas drilling site.

A recent University of Vermont study stated that abandoned oil and gas wells near fracking sites can be conduits for methane to escape into water and air. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and contributor to climate change.

Ms. Grafe-Kieklak also asserted that gas infrastructure is "monitored with effective safety technology."

According to the US DOT Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, between 1996 and 2015, there were 11,191 pipeline incidents, including 360 fatalities, 1,378 injuries, and a total cost of nearly \$657 million. In 2015 alone, there were 701 incidents, 12 fatalities, 50 injuries, and a cost of almost \$322 million. Clearly, pipelines are not safe.

We must address energy needs through clean, renewable energy. The short-term gain for the fossil fuel industry, and those associated with it, does not justify the irreparable harm that fossil fuel infrastructure would bring to our communities.

Leslie Carey
Averill Park

EditorialOpinion: Preserve the treasure that is Plum Island

Updated March 28, 2016 6:00 AM

By The Editorial Board

Newsday

Plum Island National Park. Sounds good, doesn't it? It certainly would be an appropriate designation for such a special place off our coast.

New York senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, and their Connecticut colleagues, have proposed turning the 840-acre gem over to the National Park Service or the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, in lieu of selling it, after its animal disease research center is moved to Kansas in 2022. It's a terrific idea.

But adding Plum Island to the national park system would be a complex and likely long process. So it's vital that Congress in the meantime pass a bill sponsored by Rep. Lee Zeldin (R-Shirley) to block the sale of Plum Island. The federal government had planned to use proceeds from an auction to help build the new facility in Kansas, but Congress already has appropriated the money needed. And although Southold Town has written zoning restrictions that ban residential development, a shrewd developer could buy the island, wait for turnover in Southold's government, and then push to rescind those restrictions.

CDC: Birth control needed in Puerto Rico during outbreak

March 25, 2016 2:27 PM

By The Associated Press

Newsday

Health officials say tens of thousands of IUDs and other forms of birth control are badly needed in Puerto Rico to help prevent unintended pregnancies during an outbreak of Zika, the tropical disease linked to birth defects.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the estimate Friday. CDC officials said 138,000 young Puerto Rican women do not want to get pregnant but are not using effective birth control.

Zika virus is mainly spread by mosquitoes. An epidemic in Latin America and the Caribbean is now hitting Puerto Rico. Zika causes no illness in most people. But there's mounting evidence linking infection in pregnant women to subsequent birth defects.

The CDC also released new guidance about how to protect against possible sexual spread of Zika.
